

FACULTY SENATE COMMUNICATIONS REPORT | 18 February 2016 meeting

Prepared by Christopher M. Cottingham, Communications Officer

OVERVIEW

The 2015-16 Faculty Senate held its eleventh regular meeting on 18 February 2016, from 3:45 to 5:35 pm in the Riggle Room of ADUC. While there were a few other minor items of interest, the meeting was fixated on the budgetary crisis which has subsumed Senate (and likely all university) business. Please note that the Provost was present for the entire meeting, providing a brief non-budgetary report and helpfully contributing his perspective to the budget discussion. Also of note is the fact that the full Senate will hold a special off-week meeting on 25 February with the sole purpose of debating and voting on a budget resolution (see below for further information).

BAD NEWS, EVERYONE (CONTINUED)

Shortfall specifics: If all proposed cuts are fully enacted, the university faces a total budget shortfall of \$8,859,900. That amount includes a \$3 million tuition shortfall resulting from below-expected enrollment which we would have faced regardless of the recent gubernatorial election outcome. The remainder comes from two separate funding cuts proposed by Governor Bevin, specifically a 4.5% reduction (equaling \$1,950,300) for the current fiscal year and an additional 9% cut (equaling \$3,900,600) to the 2016-17 general fund appropriation. These cuts will both need to be addressed by the end of this fiscal year (i.e., by 1 July), although Governor Bevin has indicated a willingness to allow repayment of the 2015-16 cut over a period of up to 16 months. Our own president and others in the state are trying as best they can to prevent these cuts to higher education funding, but it appears to be an uphill slog. The governor can institute the 4.5% cut for 2015-16 by executive order, and while lobbying efforts by the university presidents and the general public may be able to ameliorate the cut in the new 2016-17 budget, by his own admission he is unlikely to sign a budget that differs significantly from his proposal. Ultimately, MSU will face a shortfall ranging from \$5,850,900 in the best case to \$8,859,900 in the worst. Furthermore, the future offers no relief in sight, as all higher education funding is slated to become dependent on “performance indicators.”

Task force: Chair Adams brought the Senate up to speed on the President’s special budget task force (BTF, hereafter). A full list of the body’s 13-person membership has been posted as an announcement on the Faculty Senate Blackboard site; in brief, it comprises the President’s cabinet, the deans of the four Colleges and the Graduate School, and one representative each from Faculty Senate (Chair Adams), Staff Congress, and the Student Government Association. Discontent was expressed over the relative dearth of faculty members on the BTF; Chair Adams responded that the Executive Council (EC) did ask the President if more faculty could be included, but was rebuffed. The President seems to be of the mind that Academic Affairs is well-represented by the inclusion of the Provost and all Deans on the BTF. In addition, BTF members have been instructed to keep their deliberations confidential, and while there will be official minutes, it is unclear whether they will be made freely available. The BTF has already met three times, with another four meetings scheduled, including the final meeting on 5 March, at which time they will submit a formal list of recommendations for further consideration by the President’s cabinet before final decisions are made by the President.

Role of the Provost: Senator Ron Morrison made an impassioned plea to the Provost to battle hard for academics and the faculty as we stare down this financial precipice. The Provost responded that we can count on him to fight the good fight. He also came out strongly for academics as the core mission of the institution, and promised to hold the President to his stated intention for the budget-cutting process to be data-driven. It seems clear that, between Chair Adams and the Provost, faculty do have at least two strong advocates at the table.

Update on Issues subcommittee budget meeting: Chair-elect Dobranski and his Issues subcommittee members had their long-awaited meeting with MSU Chief Financial Officer Beth Patrick on 9 February. Although this meeting occurred before the university budget freeze announcement on 12 February, some useful bits of information can nevertheless be gleaned. Overall, the subcommittee is attempting to determine whether instructional spending has actually declined over time. Ms. Patrick claims that it has not, and that the greatest increase in spending has been in scholarships, which have had to keep pace with our increasing tuition. The apparent increase in spending on athletics was also attributed to increased scholarship expenditures. According to the administrative view, MSU is only subsidizing athletics directly to the tune of approximately \$2 million per year. According to Chair Adams, though, that number can only be arrived at by assuming that tuition money from non-scholarship athletes is “revenue” for athletics.

Chair-elect Dobranski also mentioned that some additional details on health care spending, especially with respect to cost-sharing between employees and MSU, were provided at the budget meeting; he intends to summarize those details and share

them via the Blackboard site. Finally, a question was raised on the Senate floor about whether the proposed savings from the centralized travel system have been realized. In fact, the EC was told at its last meeting with the President that those savings absolutely have been realized, and that we can expect an official report on the matter soon.

Ideas from Senators on budget priorities: During a wide-ranging discussion, several issues of importance were raised, and numerous potential ways of prioritizing budget items were proposed. The ultimate goal of this discussion, which will continue at least into a special off-week Senate meeting on 25 February, is for Senate to reach consensus and pass a formal resolution stating its position on how budget issues should be prioritized. Based upon the discussion summarized below, the EC has been charged with drafting such a resolution to be voted on at the special meeting. Both the Provost and Faculty Regent Berglee encouraged the Senate to get on the record as soon as possible.

Senator Wesley White began by suggesting that such a statement of Senate's position be organized as a set of general principles such as the university taking care of its people, prioritizing academics (and especially aspects related to the new performance metrics), and focusing on our "preferred future" as a campus community. Subsequent conversation suggested emphasizing the importance of shared governance during this process; the issue of preserving tenure was also raised, given the specter of recent events in Wisconsin engineered by an ideologically similar governor. With respect to prioritizing academics, there was some discussion of what it means to be a comprehensive regional university. Remaining as such is a stated goal of the administration, but it is unclear at this point exactly what that means. It was suggested that a clear idea of what minimum set of academic programs is required to be "comprehensive" would be helpful in setting specific priorities.

Senator Rus May commented on the odd incongruity of the university facing potential cuts to academic programs, faculty, staff, etc., while simultaneously engaging in a multi-million dollar renovation of ADUC. Subsequent discussion revealed that funds for "capital investments" (i.e., ADUC renovations, new parking and dorm construction, etc.) are specifically allocated as such by the legislature and cannot be redirected to anything else. Faculty Regent Berglee stated that, while he agrees it is an odd situation, this particular issue arises above the university level.

Both Senator Kim Sharp and your Communications Officer asked the Provost questions about the status of MSU regional campuses. Senator Sharp expressed concern as to whether students at these satellite locations are receiving the same quality of education as students enrolled on the main campus, while your CO inquired as to the possibility of closing these satellite locations to save costs. The Provost responded by lamenting a lack of data to accurately evaluate the regional campuses, in particular to determine whether closing them would indeed be a net benefit or perhaps a net loss (in tuition revenue) to the university. In any event, closing regional campuses, or shuttering any main-campus programs, represents a long-range consideration that could not contribute to addressing the immediate budget shortfall. On a related note, a question was put to the Provost regarding organizational consolidation of the entire Kentucky public university system. The Provost has heard no such talk in any official channels; nevertheless, there seemed to be some general concern among Senators that forcing such consolidation might be a longer term goal of the present state leadership.

Other topics of discussion included the potential for privatization of university functions (e.g., bookstore, custodial services, housing) and for another buyout to reduce personnel costs (highly unlikely because the previous one was apparently not well received by KTRS). Additionally, the Provost was asked about position searches; his response indicated that some of the major searches (e.g., Vice President for Student Success, Dean of the College of Science, etc.) will continue, at least for the time being, but that he has also asked all of his Deans to carefully prioritize their current faculty searches. Furthermore, the Provost was asked about whether the model of central advising for freshmen has proven to be beneficial and cost-effective. He again lamented a lack of data, but stated that the model is common at other institutions. Finally, Senator Ron Morrison made two specific suggestions (in addition to his earlier impassioned plea), namely to begin charging a nominal amount of tuition for Early College courses and to engage in some cost-saving restructuring of scholarships. The Provost was reticent on the second idea, referencing the problem of competition (or "arms race") with our sister institutions (who are effectively "buying" students), but mentioned that the first idea has at least been put under some consideration.

On a last note, it was suggested to general agreement that students must be our absolute overall priority and that their input should be sought and included as much as possible in this budget crisis. As mentioned above, the Senate will attempt to go on record about its broad budget principles at the special meeting this week; expect both Senate and subcommittee business to continue to be dominated by this issue for the foreseeable future.

POTPOURRI

Annual Committee Interest Survey: The annual Faculty Senate Committee Interest Survey is now live, and will remain open until Monday, 29 February. All faculty members should have received an email containing the link to the survey, and are urged to complete it as soon as possible. Faculty members who do not believe they have received the email should check their “clutter” folders, as some recipients have found their messages sent there. Responses to this survey are an invaluable tool to the Governance subcommittee as they work to fill vacancies on university standing committees.

Website redesign & rebrand: The university is proceeding with its long in-the-works plan to redesign its public website; this redesign will apparently include at least a partial rebranding of the university’s identity. While Senators were assured that the outside contractor (an outfit called Fuseideas) will not be billing MSU to simply change its logo font (apparently the font will not be changed at all), the Provost did say that “Much More” will probably be put out to pasture (much to the audible delight of the Senate). The Fuseideas “branding team” will be on campus this week, and will, among other things, hold a focus group with faculty. The Provost stressed the importance of this work continuing despite the budget crisis, as it is important in thinking about the long-term future of the university.

And also there was this: The Provost made a surprise announcement regarding the impending expansion of the University of Kentucky medical school program, which has since been extensively publicized in local media and on the MSU website. This expansion will bring a new three-year M.D. program to Morehead focused on rural medicine and accepting 15 students per year. The program will be an extension of the UK medical school, run by UK out of the CHER building in partnership with St. Claire Regional Medical Center. In exchange for helping to house the program, MSU will apparently receive an as yet unspecified number of slots in it each year.